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ABSTRACT

A study explored employees' perceptions of argumentativeness in the organization, specifically examining (1) how employees perceive argumentativeness and the value of argumentativeness in the organization, (2) to what extent employees argue in the workplace, and (3) whether there is any relationship between these two variables, the perception of supervisors' feelings about arguing, and employee satisfaction. Subjects, 211 employees in a wide range of occupations, responded to an argumentativeness scale as part of an organizational or business communication course they were taking. Women employees accounted for 64% of the sample. Results indicated that women were significantly less argumentative than men. Results also indicated considerable difference between those answering the scale in a general sense versus those answering the scale in terms of their own workplace, where argumentativeness was severely restricted. Preferences were to prevent and avoid arguments. Neither the organization nor the immediate supervisor tended to communicate to employees that the process of argument was valued. Findings showed that the organizational climate of a wide variety of organizations was most likely that of "not making waves," and that women "fit" into this environment more adaptively than men. Findings support the previous assumption that the autocratic style pervades American organizations, and that argument and conflict in the organizational setting continues to be viewed pejoratively--team players are preferred to "boat rockers" and "whistleblowers." (Tables of data and references are appended.) (NKA)

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Argumentativeness in the Organization: Employees Assess Its Acceptability

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Argumentativeness in the Organization: Employees Assess Its Acceptability

A trend in argumentativeness research is to explore the functioning of this concept in the organization. Infante and Rancer (1982) define argumentativeness as "a generally stable trait which predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on these issues" (p. 72).

Generally, being argumentative is viewed as an important trait. The perception of argumentativeness in education is that the process produces positive results: increased learning, less egocentric thinking, more accurate social perspective-taking, greater creativity, and better problem-solving and decision-making (Infante, 1985 b, p. 1). These benefits are the outcome of students actively involved in the process of arguing among themselves, or possibly with the instructor, over issues of educational substance (Johnson and Johnson, 1979).

As these classroom controversies enhance the learning process in various ways, argumentation in society functions as the critical lifeblood of the judicial, legislative, and political processes. Infante (1985 b) also labels the role of arguing in negotiations, social conflict, and interpersonal relations as pervasion.

Few in the field of communication would deny the value of argumentation in an overall societal context, but the circumstances and outcomes of argumentation vary and are bound by the situation. To argue that argumentativeness has benefit in the classroom when student peers debate, does not necessarily provide the

justification for enhancing argumentativeness of employees in the workplace. Much more is at stake in the organization. Nor does courtroom argumentativeness necessarily provide an analagous scenario for enhancing argumentativeness in the organization. When a person's life is in some way at risk, the issues should be presented in an open forum and evaluated by a judge or jury of peers. Public awareness and peer evaluation are important variables in courtroom argumentation.

This situational aspect of argumentativeness has been recognized as an element of the construct. Rancer (1986) points out that the "model of argumentativeness also includes situational factors in order to more accurately predict motivation to argue in a given situation. A part of this theory suggests that a person's motivation to argue in a particular situation is determined by the interaction of the person's trait, ARG gt, and their perception of the probability and importance of success and failure in the situation" (p. 3). The situational factors of the workplace need extensive consideration when the role of argumentativeness is being examined.

Initially, a situational factor to be considered is the value of that trait in the given context. Whereas the value of being argumentative is widely accepted in many areas of American life, the value of this trait in the workplace has yet to be established.

From a theoretical perspective, Infante and Gorden (1985 a) suggest that the emerging corporatist theory (Derber & Schwartz, 1983), will lead to constructive argument in the work setting. They

arrive at this conclusion from the theory itself. Corporatism is a "management system or strategy designed to maintain or increase production by generating strong feelings of loyalty of workers to their companies" (Derber & Schwartz, 1983, p. 64). Job enrichment projects and semiautonomous teams are sample strategies to engender more employee participation in their work. Quality circles are another. Ceding a measure of shop-floor control to workers is the unique feature relative worker autonomy. Infante and Gorden (1985) reason that "empowerment naturally leads to a dialectic that is necessary to management's central task of integrating the individual and varied special groups in the organization" (p.118). But such outcomes are not guaranteed. Derber and Schwartz (1983) write that the strength of the outcomes in practice will depend on many contextual factors (e.g., the type of participatory change introduced and the political context of labor/management relations).

While signs of worker participation dot the organizational landscape, autocracy still predominates. Wortman (1982) observed "we still have highly autocratic leadership in most organizations despite prescriptions by many management authorities to the contrary. In fact, we may be moving toward even more autocratic management" (p. 378). Subsequently, W. Charles Redding (1985) wrote, "I have no reason in 1985 to challenge Wortman's judgment of 1982" (p. 251).

If would follow that if autocratic forms of management dominate current American organizations, argumentativeness would not be valued by the organization as a whole or by supervisors; and employees would not be predisposed to argue in the context of the

workplace. This paper addresses these issues.

Review of Literature

Recent research on argumentativeness has examined this concept in relation to such areas as leadership and decision-making (Schultz, 1982), marital satisfaction (Rancer, Baukus, & Amato, 1986), verbal aggression (Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds,1984; Infante, Wall, Leap, Danielson, 1984), sex and sex-role orientation (Rancer & Dierks-Stewart, 1985), credibility (Infante, 1985 a), and subordinate satisfaction and organizational outcomes (Infante & Gorden, 1985a, 1985b, Gorden, 1986). This review will focus on those studies directly related to argumentativeness and the organization.

Based on the idea of corporatist theory and that argument is a constructive form of organizational communication, Infante and Gorden (1985 a) surveyed 216 midwestern employees from a wide variety of organizations. A canonical correlation produced the following relationships: (1) superiors low in verbal aggression and with some argumentiveness had satisfied employee. (2) Female supervisors with some argumentativeness were perceived more effective in upward communication by lower salaried and less satisfied subordinates. (3) Female supervisors who were low in argumentativeness had subordinates who were low in argumentativeness. These supervisors were perceived as less effective in upward communication. This third conclusion was based on a statistically significant canonical correlation of only .26. In terms of argumentativeness, this study reported one item of consequence: that perceived supervisor argumentativeness related to satisfied employees. This may further

the notion of the Pelz effect. The researchers conclude that "it may be worthwhile to investigate further the impact of arguing in superior-subordinate relations" (p. 123).

In a second study, Infante and Gorden (1985 b) surveyed 134 supervisors. Canonical correlation revealed the following: (1) the more the person was young and female, the lower was the person's salary. Argumentativeness was very slightly related. (2) The more the supervisor was low in argumentativeness, older, and female, the less perceived effectiveness in upward communication, the less career satisfaction, and the lower the salary. This also implies that the person higher in argumentativeness, has more perceived effectiveness in upward communication, more career satisfaction, and higher salary. Similar to the first study, the results of the argumentativeness construct is in reference to supervisors and their effectiveness. The construct for subordinates has not proven substantial. As the researchers conclude, "The idea of argumentativeness as a form of organizational communication seems relatively undeveloped" (p. 200).

Gorden (1986) summarizes earlier organizational-argumentative research by stating that "the more subordinates perceive their superiors are high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggressiveness, the more subordinates also will be argumentative and have job satisfaction. It is our contention that superior-subordinate dialectic is more probable when individuals predisposed to argumentativeness come together in an appropriate setting" (p.7). This conclusion appears to exceed the reported results. Supervisors high in argumentativeness and low in verbal aggression

related to satisfied subordinates, but the loading on subordinate's argumentativeness was .00. The similarity of argumentativeness for supervisors and subordinates appeared in the third root, which was fairly weak. In that root, where supervisor-subordinate argumentativeness related, employee satisfaction was not related (loading of .07).

With research on organizational argumentativeness in its infancy, there is much to investigate. Past research assumed the positiveness of arguing in the workplace. This study, conducted to explore employees' perceptions of argumentativeness, assumed a pessimistic, yet real-world view of the construct in the organizatiom. Several questions guided the research: 1) How do employees perceive argumentativeness in the organization? 2) To what extent do employees argue in the workplace? 3) How do employees perceive the value of argumentativeness in the workplace? 4) Is there any relationship between employees' argumentativeness, the perceived value of arguing in the organization, the perception of supervisors' feelings about arguing, and employee satisfaction?

Method

Data was gathered over a three and a half year period. A total of 211 full or parttime employees responded to the Argumentativeness Scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982) as part of an Organizational or Business Communication course they were taking. Questionnaires were completed prior to any discussion of the construct. In answering the Argumentative Scale, the subjects were asked to rate the statements in the context of their work. In addition, the following single item statements were included: 1) I feel my

company (or place of work) highly values argument over controversial issues, 2) I feel my immediate supervisor at work highly values argument over controversial issues, 3) I feel very satisfied with the organization for which I work.

Males comprised 35.5 percent of the sample (N = 75), women accounted for 64 percent (N = 135), with 0.5 percent (N = 1) not designated. The ages ranged from 19 to 43, with an average age of 24.8 years.

The employees worked in a wide range of occupations. Two-thirds of the respondents were found in the following job designations: 5.7 percent in education, 27.5 percent in sales, 1.4 percent in manufacturing, 10.4 percent in government, 3.3 percent in banking, 4.7 percent in health care, .5 percent in insurance, and 12.3 percent in communication-related jobs. The remaining one-third of the employees listed various other positions, such as waitressing, construction, and maintenance. The average years employed in these jobs was 2.4 years. Eighty two percent of the employees were in their first three years of their current job. The yearly breakdown was: Forty-five percent in their first year of employement, 21 percent in their second year, 16 percent in their third. Fifteen percent of the sample had been employed in the current job for four or more years. Two-thirds of these employees were hourly workers, another 19 percent were salaried, with the remaining 15 percent unclassified.

The sample is dominated by women, average age of 25 year olds, hourly workers in their first - third year of employment with the current organization.

Results

Initially, an analysis of variance conducted on the samples by year of admininstration ($F = .6085$, $df = 4,193$, $p > .66$) indicated that there was no significant difference among the groups. Therefore, the data was analyzed as a whole.

The reliability of the Avoid items of the Modified Argumentativeness Scale which was answered in the context of the workplace had a Coefficient Alpha of .81 [compared to .85 for this portion of the Scale without context (Infante & Gorden, 1985 a)]. The Approach items in the organization context had an Alpha of .86 [compared to .88 for those items answered under context-free conditions (Infante & Gorden, 1985 a)]. The mean for ARG gt in this study was .39, with a standard deviation of 12.344. In developing the test, Infante and Rancer (1982) reported a mean of 4.44 and a standard deviation of 9.83.

When men and women employees are compared on the Modified Argumentativeness Scale, women were significantly less argumentative than men ($t = 3.06$, $p < .003$). The means of women on this version was -1.55. SD = 12.582 [compared to 3.20 for females in the context-free version of the scale (Infante, 1982)]. The mean for males on the organizational version was 3.74 compared to 5.50 for males on the context-free scale (Infante, 1982).

No items on the Modified Argumentativeness Scale (Table 1), were rated "often true" or "almost often true." The employees rated the following four "Avoid" items "occasionally true": I enjoy avoiding arguments at work; I am happy when I keep an argument happening at work; I prefer being with people at work

who rarely disagree with me; I try to avoid getting into arguments at work.

Correspondingly, four Approach items were rated "occasionally true": I am energetic and enthusiastic when I argue at work; I have a pleasant, good feeling when I win a pont in an argument at work; i enjoy defending my point of view on an issue at work; I have the ability to do well in an argument at work.

The remaining twelve items on the Modified Scale were rated "rarely true."

Likewise, the employees indicated that it was "rarely true" (mean = 2.06) that their companies or places of work highly valued argument over controversial issues. Men and women did not significantly differ in their views on the organizational value of controversy. Similar results were reported for how the employees perceive their immediate supervisor feeling about arguing over controversial issues (mean = 2.28). Again, there was no difference between the views of men and women.

There was "moderate" satisfaction with the organizations (mean = 3.47). Women felt significantly more satisfied with the organization than did men ($t = -2.84$, $p < .005$).

A canonical correlation analysis was conducted with the predictor variables as 1) the value the company places on arguing controversial issues, 2) the value the immediate supervisor feels for arguing, 3) sex, and 4) years on the job. Dependent variables were identified as 1) the employee's argumentativeness and 2) the employee's satisfaction with the

organization.

Two roots were extracted (Tables 2 & 3). The first root was moderate, Rc = .46, Wilks' A = .74, $p < .0001$. The second root, though statistically significant, was below .30, and therefore is considered trivial (Tucker, et al., 1981).

The results of the canonical correlation indicated a high degree of relationship of the perceived value that arguing holds for both the organization as a whole and the immediate supervisor with the employees' argumentativeness. The second root, though inconsequential, found a relationship of sex and the company's value of arguing with organizational satisfaction.

Discussion

It appears that the Argumentativeness Scale can withstand the context-specific requirements imposed upon it for this study; however, consideration should be given to the development of a specific Organizational-Argumentativeness (OrgArg) instrument for future research.

In comparing normative data on the Scale with the modified scale, there is considerable difference between those answering the Scale in a general sense versus those responding to the Scale in terms of their workplace. Workplace argumentativeness was severely restricted. It is not clear from the data with whom employees moderately enjoy arguing, winning, and defending points. Is it with supervisors, subordinates, coworkers?

When argument occurs employees take it seriously, get involved to a moderate degree, feel they do moderately well, and have a moderately good feeling when winning. But it appears that

the preference of these employees is to prevent and avoid arguments and associate with colleagues who confirm rather than disagree.

Women in the context of work show signs of extremely low argumentativeness. This reinforces the cultural sex-role expectations which encourage women to be cooperative rather than competitive and argumentative. For several years, the field of forensics has been investigating why so few young college women compete in intercollegiate debate (Logue, 1986).

Neither the organization nor the immediate supervisor tends to communicate to employees that the process of argument is valued. The organizational climates of a wide variety of organizations are most likely that of "not making waves." And it is women who "fit" into this environment more adaptively than men. It is women who are more satisfied, but the relationship between satisfaction and conformity to the norm of nonargument is not established.

This study supports Redding's belief that the autocratic style prevades American organizations. Argument and conflict in the organizational setting continues to be viewed perjoratively (Infante & Gorden, 1985 b). Team player is preferred to boat rocker and whistleblower, and organizational members realize this.

When argument increases in the workplace, authority can be questioned. The issues of power and control become even more salient than they are under normal conditions. The rationale that arguing employees are more involved does have some merit when the matters are ego-involving to those employees. If this is the case, then winning and losing arguments also become ego-

involving. The arbitrator of argument in the workplace is established for formal negotiations between labor and management, but the arbitrator for other debates, is nonexistent.

The corporatist theorists argue that involved employees mean satisfied and thus loyal employees. Argument may function to involve, but the winning and losing would appear to be related to satisfaction. An employee who has won, will be satisfied; one who loses will be dissatisfied and potentially disloyal. Experiences with groupthink might suggest that the loyal employee may not be the ones who would encourage argument (Janis, 1972).

The situational variables of the organization need to be carefully understood before the argumentative perspective can even begin to be instituted.

Table 1

Modified Argumentativeness Scale:

Item Means and Standard Deviations

Item	Mean	SD
1. While in an argument at work, I worry that the person I am arguing with will form a negative impression of me.	2.49	1.01
2. Arguing over controversial issues at work improves my intelligence.	2.95	1.15
3. I enjoy avoiding arguments at work.	3.36	1.24
4. I am energetic and enthusiastic when I argue at work.	3.12	1.22
5. Once I finish an argument at work, I promise myself that I will not get into another.	2.36	1.26
6. Arguing with a person at work creates more problems for me than it solves.	2.70	1.18
7. I have a pleasant, good feeling when I win a point in an argument at work.	3.83	.98
8. When I finish arguing with someone at work I feel nervous and upset.	2.73	1.16
9. I enjoy a good argument over a controversial issue at work.	2.88	1.19
10. I get an unpleasant feeling when I realize I am about to get to an argument at work.	2.97	1.21
11. I enjoy defending my point of view on an issue at work.	3.86	1.00
12. I am happy when I keep an argument from happening at work.	3.57	1.09
13. I do not like to miss the opportunity to argue a controversial issue at work.	2.14	1.05
14. I prefer being with people at work who rarely disagree with me.	3.08	1.12
15. I consider an argument at work an exciting intellectual challenge.	2.70	1.11
16. I find myself unable to think of effective points during an argument at work.	2.31	.95
17. I feel refreshed and satisfied after an argument on a controversial issue at work.	2.62	.97
18. I have the ability to do well in an argument at work.	3.58	.99
19. I try to avoid getting into arguments at work.	3.60	1.14
20. I feel excitement when I expect that a conversation I am in is leading to an argument at work.	2.08	.98

Table 2

Standardized canonical coefficients for dependent variables and predictors (independent variables)

	Root 1	Root 2
Dependents		
Argumentative	1.00024	-.04886
Satisfaction	.10233	.99619
Predictors		
Co Values	.44290	.42387
Sup Values	.60767	.03290
Sex	-.43078	.86172
Yrs/Job	-.09467	-.01200

Table 3

Correlations between Dependent & Canonical Variables and Predictors & Canonical Variables

Dependents		
Argumentative	.99477	-.10218
Satisfaction	.04879	.99881
Predictors		
Co Values	.72334	.51088
Super Values	.84365	.24256
Sex	-.38938	.89699
Yrs/Job	-.09816	-.20964
Canonical correlations	.45555	.26235
Canonical R Squared	.20753	.06883
F statistic	7.63102	4.60741
Probability	.0001	.004

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